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TUSKLESS ELEPHANTS — **Rapid** Evolution?

2022 VBS
FEARLESS

The Integrity of
the **BIBLICAL** Text
Part III

**Number
Endings**
in Genesis 5



Are *Tuskless Elephants* Evidence of Rapid *Darwinian Evolution?*

Jeff Miller, Ph.D.

ACCORDING to the recent research of Princeton University evolutionary biologist Shane Campbell-Staton and his colleagues (published in *Science* magazine in October¹) ivory poaching has caused the “rapid evolution” of African elephants. Elephants with tuskless genetics have become more typical among the species. Is the proliferation of elephant tusklessness evidence of Darwinian evolution?

While various forms of evolution have been promoted for millennia,² Charles Darwin’s version included a new feature: natural selection. Natural selection is the idea that “nature” selects the best “fit” organisms for survival, while those less suited for an environment, if they do not migrate, will tend to die off. So, if a particular variety of finch or English Peppered Moth is more suited to an environment than another variety, the better suited option will tend to survive and propagate its genes, while the less suited species will tend to eventually die out, along with its “inferior” genes. Natural selection is, by and large, a reasonable idea and does not contradict biblical Creation. Natural selection does **not**, however, actually change an organism. It does not have the capability

of changing a single-celled organism into a human over time, as Darwin theorized it could. In the well-known words of Dutch botanist and geneticist Hugo de Vries, “Natural selection may explain the survival of the fittest, but it cannot explain the **arrival** of the fittest.”³

How, then, does the new, “more fit,” variety come about? Princeton University evolutionary biologists Peter and Rosemary Grant spent over 35 years studying Darwin’s famous Galapagos finches. As we have discussed elsewhere,⁴ Darwin noted how different shapes and sizes of beaks in finches may have contributed to the survival and flourishing of various bird varieties and the extinction of others. But where did the beak shape and size variety originate? As high school Biology textbooks correctly teach, the Grants found that “for beak size and shape to evolve, there must be enough **heritable variation** in those traits to provide raw material for natural selection.”⁵ “Heritable variation” refers to genetic variety that can be **inherited** from parents and expressed in the species’ offspring. In other words, parents already have the genetic variety in their genes which is then expressed

in their offspring. If that potential for variety did not **already exist** in the genes of the parents, that variety could not be expressed in an offspring. “Without heritable variation in beak sizes, the medium ground finch **would not be able to adapt** to feeding on larger, tougher seeds during a drought.”⁶

Now to the point: elephants, along with any species on the planet, have a tremendous amount of genetic potential for variety in their offspring. Some elephants have “tusk genes” and are able to grow tusks, while the other elephants have “tuskless genes.” If poachers target elephants with tusks, obviously the elephants with tusk genes are going to tend to die out, along with the tusk genes that they have. In the meantime, the elephants with tuskless genes will tend to survive and begin thriving. The population of African elephants (and the genes they possess) will shift to predominantly tuskless, which is what scientists are finding. But did African elephants evolve?

Well, it depends upon your definition. Did the overall population of the African elephant **change** (“evolve”) from predominantly



tusked to tuskless? Yes. Was the change Darwinian (i.e., the kind of change that could allow an elephant to grow new components and turn into something else)? No. New genetic information is required in order for a species to evolve across a phylogenetic boundary into a totally different **kind** of species,⁷ and no new genetic information was introduced to the species (and there is no known natural mechanism for the generation of new genetic information⁸). Instead, **already existing** genetic information was simply expressed more often among the elephants.

Here are three key takeaways from the tuskless elephant study:

1. Are tuskless elephants still elephants? Yes. They have not evolved into something else, nor will they do so given enough time.
2. Has new genetic information spontaneously generated (or been created by random genetic mutations) as tuskless African elephants have begun to gain dominance? No. The genetic information already existed.
3. Has progressive evolution happened? No, and, in fact, **de**-evolution has occurred since the tusk gene has diminished in the African elephant population (i.e., genetic information is being lost). While tuskless elephants can more easily survive death by poachers, overall tuskless elephants will be more vulnerable to other predators in the wild.

Variety among species exists. Some varieties thrive in certain environments/situations. If, however, distinctions in species must come from the genetic variety of their ancestors, where did the **original** genetic information originate? That's the more important question. If the origin of information is always the product of a mind, then the genetic information for the tusks of the African elephant originated from a powerful Mind that created it.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Shane C. Campbell-Staton, et al. (2021), "Ivory Poaching and the Rapid Evolution of Tusklessness in African Elephants," *Science*, 374[6566]:483-487.
- ² Bert Thompson (1981), *The History of Evolutionary Thought* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press).
- ³ Hugo de Vries (1905), *Species and Varieties: Their Origin by Mutation*, ed. Daniel Trembly MacDougal (Chicago, IL: Open Court), pp. 825-826, emp. added.
- ⁴ Kyle Butt (2006), "What Do the Finches Prove?" *R&R Resources*, 5[9]:33-R, <https://apologeticspress.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/0609.pdf>.
- ⁵ Kenneth R. Miller and Joseph S. Levine (2010), *Biology* (Boston, MA: Pearson), p. 472, emp. added.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 473, emp. added.
- ⁷ Jeff Miller (2014), "God and the Laws of Science: Genetics vs. Evolution [Part 1]," *Reason & Revelation*, 34[1]:2-20, <https://www.apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=9&article=4779&topic=296>.
- ⁸ Ibid. Cf. Jeff Miller (2014), "God and the Laws of Science: Genetics vs. Evolution [Part 2]," *Reason & Revelation*, 34[2]:14-21, <https://apologeticspress.org/god-and-the-laws-of-science-genetics-vs-evolution-part-2-4788/>.



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THE INTEGRITY OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

PART III: The Text of the Old Testament

Justin Rogers, Ph.D.

[**Editor's Note:** This article is the third installment in a three-part series pertaining to the integrity of the biblical text through the centuries. AP auxiliary writer Dr. Rogers serves as Director of the Graduate School of Theology at Freed-Hardeman University. He holds an M.A. in New Testament from FHU as well as an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Hebraic, Judaic, and Cognate Studies from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.]

THE Old Testament was written over a span of about 1,000 years by approximately 30 different authors (most of whom are anonymous) in at least three different countries (Egypt, Israel, and Babylon) in two different languages (Hebrew and Aramaic). We have nothing that any of the biblical authors personally wrote, nor do we even have a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy. In fact, we cannot know for certain how many steps removed our earliest manuscripts are from the originals. All of these facts pose serious challenges to those who wish to know what the Holy Spirit originally inspired (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

Sensing vulnerability, critics of the Bible continue to pound away at the anvil of skepticism. They

deny the possibility of any knowledge of the original text of the Bible. They remind us that some literature (especially the Prophets) originated orally, and allege we cannot know how accurately it was written. We cannot know whether or not the Bible substantially changed over the course of its transmission through time. We cannot know whether some inspired books were lost (the Bible makes numerous references to books we no longer possess).¹ Therefore, we cannot know what to believe. How do people of faith respond to such assertions?

Can we know with any degree of confidence that we have the Bible? Can we use the evidence available to reconstruct the text of the Old Testament? These simple questions involve complex answers. In this article we shall attempt to emphasize the challenges inherent in establishing the text of the Old Testament. We shall also argue that, despite these challenges, **we can, indeed, have confidence in how we got the Old Testament.**

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The two great codices of the Hebrew Bible are the Aleppo Codex

(10th century A.D.) and the Leningrad Codex (11th century A.D.). These both represent the Masoretic text type, and are excellent copies. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars and textual critics who sought to preserve the traditional pronunciation of the Hebrew text. This led them to develop a system of vowel “points” to assist in pronunciation. The value of their work is that they did not wish to change the consonantal **writing** of the text (Hebrew, even today, is not traditionally written with vowels). The system of *k^ṣativ* (pronounced, k-TEEV) and *q^ṣere* (pronounced k-RAY), the former meaning “what is written” and the latter “what is read,” explains that the Masoretes recognized there were transcriptional errors in the Bible, but these were not to be **read** since most make no sense at all in Hebrew. The fact that the Masoretes were willing to preserve the text, even when they knew it contained copying mistakes, tells us how seriously they took their work. They viewed themselves as mere transmitters, like modern copy machines. They transmitted exactly what they received.

Although the Masoretes worked in the Middle Ages, most scholars believe the basic text with which the Masoretes worked had become standard by the first century A.D. In fact, of the biblical manuscripts discovered in the area of the Dead Sea (excluding the site of Qumran), **all of them** match the later Masoretic text. This should give us a great deal of confidence in the text of the Old Testament. At Qumran, the so-called “proto-Masoretic” text type is the most prominent, although a greater variation can be observed here than at other Judean desert sites.² This points to the careful copying of the Hebrew Bible.

All English translations today are essentially reflections of the Masoretic Hebrew text, and, if the

Dead Sea Scrolls are consulted at all, they are usually accounted for in the footnotes (see especially the RSV and ESV). This is due to the fragmentary nature of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the uncertainty of using the ancient translations (such as the Septuagint) as a means to reconstruct what the Hebrew **might** have said. While we would love to discover the original autograph of any biblical book, the closeness of most of our earliest biblical manuscripts to those of Medieval times furnishes us a reason to have confidence in the accuracy of the transmission of our Old Testament.

The Aleppo Codex

The Aleppo Codex has a fascinating history. It was carefully copied sometime in the early 10th century A.D., and contains what was then the recent refinement of Masoretic vowel points by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (10th century A.D.), whom the Jews regard as the greatest of Masoretic grammarians. A book of great value, it was housed in Jerusalem during the First Crusade (A.D. 1096-1099) before it was taken by the Crusaders and held for ransom. Finally released undamaged, the Codex came to rest in Egypt for the next 200 years. After this it was apparently taken to Aleppo, Syria, where it was carefully guarded for the next 600 years. Even the great textual critic Paul Kahle, former editor of the standard academic edition, *Biblia Hebraica*, was denied access to the Codex.

After the United Nations resolved to form the modern State of Israel in 1947, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Syria, leading the Arab population of Aleppo to burn the Great Synagogue where the Codex was housed. After this point, the story becomes nebulous. What we know for certain is that the Codex was complete or nearly complete before the riot, and today, 196 of

the original 491 pages are missing. Some allege that fire destroyed these pages, but those who have closely examined the Codex find little evidence of fire damage. Others allege that pages were intentionally torn from the Codex, perhaps in an effort to save as much as possible in the midst of a precarious situation. 118 of the 196 missing pages are from the Pentateuch (the oldest and holiest part of Scripture for the Jews), and a few individual leaves have emerged through the decades. This evidence suggests that concerned Jews did in fact tear pages from the Codex likely in an effort to save them.³ But whether these rescued pages will ever come to light is impossible to say.

The significance of the Aleppo Codex lies in its largely complete nature for many biblical books. 295 pages survive. Only 12 books are missing completely (Genesis–Numbers, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, Obadiah, Jonah and Haggai), although others are missing parts (Deuteronomy, 2 Kings, Psalms, Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah). Still, it is the best Masoretic manuscript in existence.

The Leningrad Codex

The early 11th century Leningrad Codex is today housed in St. Petersburg, Russia (“Leningrad” under the former Soviet Union). This copy, like the Aleppo Codex, belongs to the Ben Asher family of Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts, and serves as the basis for the standard *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* and the more recent *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, the standard academic editions from which most modern Old Testament translations come. The Hebrew University Bible Project, on the other hand, has elected to utilize the Aleppo Codex as its primary base text. Although scholars generally regard the Aleppo Codex as

more reliable, the two manuscripts are extremely similar. The Leningrad Codex holds the distinction of being the oldest complete Hebrew Bible known to exist, although it is not even 1,000 years old.

The Nash Papyrus

We now turn from more or less complete copies of the Bible to fragments. Acquired in 1902, the Nash Papyrus (so named from Walter Llewellyn Nash who purchased it) dates to the late 2nd century B.C., and was the oldest copy of any part of the Old Testament text known before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The manuscript is small, being about 5.5 inches tall and a little over 2 inches wide (see Figure 1). Only 24 lines are legible, and these represent the Ten Commandments and part of the Shema’ (pronounced sh-MAH) extracted from Deuteronomy 5 and 6. Some have suggested the text was a phylactery due to its size (cf. Matthew 23:5).



Figure 1. Nash Papyrus (late second century B.C.) (Wikimedia commons, public domain)

(cont. on p. 32)

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One interesting difference between the Nash Papyrus and the received Hebrew text is the former's absence of "the house of slavery" in reference to Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:6). Some have alleged that, since the papyrus likely originated in Egypt, the scribe wished not to offend his homeland with such a reference, and so removed it. If the Nash Papyrus is a personal copy intended for private use, we might assume that the strict rules about the sanctity of every word of Scripture did not apply quite as strictly as it might for a synagogue copy (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 5:18). However, it is also possible (although less likely) that the parent-text (what the Germans call the *Vorlage*) did not contain these words and the scribe of the Nash Papyrus is copying what was in front of him.

The Silver Scrolls from Ketef Hinnom

In 1979 two small, silver scrolls containing the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:23-26) were found in an excavation near Jerusalem. The larger of these texts measures just one inch in width and not quite four inches in length. The smaller is a half-inch in width and about an inch and a half in length. Despite their size, these texts, which date to the 7th century B.C., represent **the oldest copies of any part of the biblical text** we possess. Ironically, they seem to have been intended as amulets to ward off evil spirits (cf. Isaiah 3:20; Ezekiel 13:18,20).

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The oldest of the biblical manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls date to the mid-3rd century B.C., and the latest date to the 1st century A.D. 4QExod-Lev^f (4Q17) and 4QSam^b (4Q52) are the two oldest known to exist, and both date to the mid-3rd century B.C. The former probably once contained the entire Pentateuch, but now includes only five

fragments totaling 259 words. The latter contains about 23 fragments and represents various sections of 1 Samuel 12-23. The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) is the **only one of the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls to survive in its entirety**. Because of the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it is impossible to compile a complete Hebrew Bible from the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴ So, while of tremendous value, our ability to apply what we learn from the Dead Sea Scrolls is limited.

The fragments that do exist offer a number of variant readings. While none of these variants alters the theology of the Old Testament, many of them are noteworthy. For example, traditional English translations set the height of Goliath at six cubits and a span, following the Masoretic Hebrew Text (1 Samuel 17:4). But the oldest Hebrew copy of the Goliath story of Samuel, 4QSam^a, agrees with the Septuagint that Goliath's height was four cubits and a span.⁵ This drops the height of Goliath from about nine and a half feet to about six and a half feet! The oldest reading is perhaps the original reading.

Another example can be provided from the Great Isaiah Scroll. In Isaiah 53:11 1QIsa^a agrees with the Septuagint, reading, "From the anguish of his soul he shall see **light** and be satisfied." The Masoretic Hebrew, represented in most English translations, does not have the word "light." It is uncertain whether the word "light" has been inserted into the Isaiah Scroll or removed from the Masoretic Hebrew. So, in this case, we cannot be certain what the original reading was.

There are a few occasions in which we know material is missing in the Masoretic Hebrew text. For example, Psalm 145 is an acrostic Psalm in which each line begins with the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet (א, ב, ג, ד, etc.). The problem is that the line begin-

ning with the letter *nun* (נ) is missing. 11QPs^a, the only Dead Sea Scrolls Psalms manuscript to cover Psalm 145, has the *nun* verse: "God is faithful in his words and gracious in all his works." It just so happens again that the missing verse matches what was already preserved in the Septuagint long ago. There is no question the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls preserve the original reading.

I do not wish to give the impression that the Dead Sea Scrolls always agree with the Septuagint. In fact, Emanuel Tov states that no single Qumran manuscript can be regarded as the parent text of any book translated into its Septuagint Greek form. Rather, Tov offers the following statistics: of the Pentateuch, only 46 manuscripts provide a sufficient basis for analysis. Of these manuscripts, 27 (nearly 60%) clearly anticipate the later Masoretic Text, while only one generally matches the Septuagint. The remaining 18 cannot be aligned with any known textual tradition (39%). Of the remaining books of Scripture, 75 manuscripts are sufficient for analysis. Of these, 33 anticipate the Masoretic Text (44%) while only five reflect the text represented by the Septuagint. Among these manuscripts Tov regards 37 as unaligned (49%).⁶ In other words, manuscripts matching the later Masoretic text are dominant.

Of course, the various textual traditions are not as divergent as one might be led to believe by these statistics. Textual criticism is concerned with **minute details** such as the presence or absence of letters or the division of words. For example, "valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4) assumes the Hebrew צל מות, but the Hebrew text actually has צלמות, meaning "deathly darkness." The difference in definition hangs on a single **space** in a word, and not on a different text! Another

example would be the spelling of Moses as משה or מושה, or David as דוד or דויד. These spelling differences count as variants, but in no way change the meaning. It should also be stressed that statistical analyses, such as those cited above, tend to be highly subjective, and many others are bound to disagree. Further discoveries could substantially alter what we think we now know. Humility is always appropriate in the field of textual criticism. Still, the plurality of various Old Testament texts at Qumran seems to match a similar variety with Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. There was no “authorized version” of the Bible at the time of Jesus.

TEXTUAL PLURALITY AND NEW TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS

We have striven thus far to show the Hebrew Bible did not exist in one pristine form at the time of the New Testament. Were the New Testament authors aware of this situation? If so, how do they handle the textual variety? It seems clear that the New Testament authors both respected and utilized the textual variety in existence. The New Testament quotations sometimes match the Masoretic Hebrew exactly (e.g., Mark 14:23 ~ Isaiah 53:12), sometimes match the Septuagint exactly (e.g., Mark 7:6–7 ~ Isaiah 29:13), sometimes agree more with the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., Romans 15:10 ~ Deuteronomy 32:43 [= 4QDeut^a], and sometimes match nothing else known (i.e., they are “unaligned” in scholarly parlance; e.g., Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11 ~ Habakkuk 2:4).

There are times when the Greek translation is actually a clearer reflection of the Divine intent than the Hebrew original. For example, to refute the Sadducees, Jesus quotes the Septuagint form of Exodus 3:6: “I am the God of Abraham,

the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32). The Hebrew language has no present tense verb, and thus the “I am” verb is missing in the Hebrew text of Exodus 3:6 (note the NKJV italicizes the word “am” in Exodus 3:6, indicating its absence in the Hebrew text). In order to leave no doubt about the meaning, Jesus cites the Greek form of the verse (which specifies the present tense).

There are other occasions when the New Testament authors might generalize a verse by altering it slightly. Paul’s quotations of Habakkuk 2:4 could fall into this category. The Masoretic Hebrew reads, “The just shall live by his faith,” which can be understood either as the faithfulness of the just man or the faithfulness of God. The Septuagint clarifies, “The just shall live by my faith,” unambiguously referring to God. The difference between the possessive pronouns “his” and “my” is just one stroke of one letter in Hebrew (“his” = ה and “my” = י). These letters are often confused in Hebrew manuscripts (to the sympathetic comfort of many elementary Hebrew students!), and it appears

Paul here wishes both to eliminate the textual confusion and generalize the truth of the verse with the more abstract, “The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

The way the New Testament authors used the various versions of the Scriptures is not unlike the way many preachers use English translations. I have heard the sermons of several who prefer the King James Version but switch to the American Standard Version when preaching on Psalm 119:160a. The former reads, “Thy word is true from the beginning,” while the latter states, “The sum of thy word is truth.” Since the Hebrew is ambiguous (literally, “the head of your word is true [or truth]”), either translation can be regarded as possible. But most would opt for the passage that “preaches” better or makes a clearer point. In the absence of certainty, perhaps it is not foolish to follow such a course, even though modern translators (and preachers!) do not have the benefit of inspiration. The bottom line is this: despite minor differences across the manuscripts, **the Old Testament is remarkably—one might say providentially—preserved and transmitted.**

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CONCLUSION

The text of the Old Testament was both confirmed and complicated by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Septuagint likewise supports the basic content of the traditional Hebrew, but also contains some differences that need not be overlooked. Modern translations of the Old Testament generally take into account all of the evidence, exercising their best judgment when it seems there may be a mistake in transmission of the Masoretic Hebrew. For example, Genesis 47:21 in the Masoretic text seems to have mistaken the letter *daleth* (ד) for *resh* (ר), an understandable mistake, as these letters are very similar in appearance. The RSV and ESV have elected to follow the ancient versions (Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, and Latin Vulgate) while the KJV and ASV choose to translate the Masoretic Hebrew, in spite of its apparent mistake. Again, in 1 Samuel 1:24, almost all the modern versions read “three-year-old bull” as opposed to the KJV and NKJV which have “three bulls.” The KJV tradition follows the Masoretic Hebrew (even though it is difficult to imagine Hannah dragging three bulls to Shiloh!), while the modern versions follow 4QSam^a, the Septuagint, and the Syriac traditions. The oldest text makes better sense in this case.

The evidence suggests we should exercise good judgment in our reading of the Old Testament, as the New Testament authors seem to do. Only in a handful of cases are there differences in the textual traditions worth noting, and even then the differences concern minute details that, while important to textual critics, **do not alter any major teaching of the Old Testament.** It appears that God has provided us with an Old Testament text substantially accurate in all we need to know about His character and His will.

Critics who allege we cannot know the text of the Bible must resort to building mountains out of molehills. Let them produce one variant reading from the Old Testament that substantially alters a theological point affirmed by Jesus or the Apostles. The basic differences in the textual traditions of the Old Testament can be compared to the differences in English translations. While one person’s Bible might have a different word or phrase here and there, **the substantial message of God’s Word remains the same.**

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Just to cite a few examples, Numbers refers to the “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Numbers 21:15). Joshua refers to the “Book of Jashar” (Joshua 10:13), and 2 Chronicles 9:29 alone refers to three different works: the “Words of Nathan the Prophet,” the “Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite,” and the “Visions of Iddo the Seer.”
- ² See Emanuel Tov (2001), *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), second revised edition, p. 108.
- ³ For a fascinating account of the history of the Aleppo Codex, see Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider (2010), *The Crown of Aleppo: The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex* (Philadelphia, PA: JPS), and more popularly, Matti Friedman (2013), *The Aleppo Codex: In Pursuit of One of the World’s Most Coveted, Sacred and Mysterious Books* (New York: Algonquin Books).
- ⁴ For a convenient translation of the biblical Scrolls, see Martin G. Abegg, Jr. and Peter Flint (2002), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (San Francisco, CA: Harper).
- ⁵ 4QSam^a is a strange manuscript, containing 81 variants that match no other known Samuel text (see Donald W. Parry (2002), “Unique Readings in 4QSam^a,” in *The Bible as Book: The Hebrew Bible and the Judean Desert Discoveries*, ed. Edward D. Herbert and Emanuel Tov [London: The British Library], pp. 209-217).
- ⁶ Tov, p. 108.



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IT'S TIME TO GO DEEPER.

Q&A: NUMBER ENDINGS IN GENESIS 5

5 This is the written account of Adam's line.

Eric Lyons

Q: “When I read Genesis 5, the numbers appear mythical. I don’t mean in length, but the actual, statistical likelihood that there are ten zeros in the list and many fives. In fact, almost everything follows a zero. Adam lived 800 years after his son. Noah had his children at 500 years old, and the flood started when Noah was 600 years old, and he lived 350 years after the flood. Enoch was taken after 300 years. There is no deviation or variation. It’s like the author was either unable to do math, or made it too simple, or was just making it up—thus all the zeros. Can you help with this issue?”

A: Normally, when people ask questions about the numbers in Genesis 5, the discussion centers on the long lifespans of the patriarchs (e.g., “How could Methuselah live to be 969 years old?”). This question, however, considers the likelihood of so many of the patriarchs’ lifespans, as well as their ages when they had sons, ending in 0 or 5. Are Moses’ numbers made up?

First, keep in mind that simply because something may initially seem improbable does not necessarily make it impossible or incorrect. Many Bible questions are more clearly answered once we delve more deeply into the biblical, historical, and cultural context. For example, in the first century, any part of a day could be computed for the whole day and the night following it. The Bible writers could truthfully equate “on the third,” “after three days,” and “three days and three nights” (even

though such language may initially sound contradictory to us).¹

Second, there actually **is** some variation from “0” and “5” endings in Genesis 5. The lifespans of four of the ten patriarchs end in numbers **other than** 0 and 5. Seth died at 912, Jared at 962, Methuselah at 969, and Lamech at 777 (Genesis 5:8,20,27,31). Furthermore, the ages at which Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech had sons ended with numbers **other than** 0 and 5 (Genesis 5:18,25,28). A person may question the **amount** of variation within Genesis 5, but there **is** variation. What’s more, there is even more variation of numbers in Genesis 11 in the list of 10 Messianic ancestors between Noah’s son, Shem, and Abram (11:10-32).

Third, there obviously was **some** rounding of numbers up or down. Since there were no days, weeks, or months mentioned in Genesis 5, the numbers clearly include a rounding to the nearest year. Do we not often truthfully and acceptably round up or down all sorts of numbers? When someone asks (at 10:59), “What’s the time?” is it wrong to say it’s 11:00? Is it dishonest to say, “We just drove 800 miles,” when we actually drove 789 miles? Is it a lie to say a car costs \$10,000 when it really costs \$9,999? God neither lies nor approves of lying (Titus 1:2; Ephesians 5:25); however, rounding numbers (when no deceit is intended) is acceptable and often customary. In fact, the person who says, “I’m 22 years, 11 months, 28 days, 10 hours, 7 minutes, and 22 seconds

old,” rather than simply saying “22” or “23,” is being excessively specific (and annoying).² The rounding of numbers is often a welcomed relief.

Finally, even if all 10 patriarchs mentioned in Genesis 5 did have children or pass away at an age that ended in a 5 or 0 (which was not the case), such ages would not make the numbers wrong. They might seem statistically unlikely, but how many times in human history has something happened that seemed statistically unlikely? Has someone ever rolled a pair of dice 10 times and 10 times in a row got a total of 5 or 10? Probably. How many times could someone roll a pair of dice and not get combinations that equal seven? In 2009, a woman did this **157 times in a row**,³ which reportedly is a 1 in 1.56 trillion chance.⁴ Yet, it happened.

Though the numbers in Genesis 5 may **seem** unusual at first glance, a more thorough consideration helps to clarify the matter. In truth, the number-endings are neither impossible nor unlikely.⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ See Eric Lyons (2004), “Did Jesus Rise ‘On’ or ‘After’ the Third Day?” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/did-jesus-rise-on-or-after-the-third-day-756/>.

² And is technically **still rounding** to the nearest second (and not tenth of a second or hundredth of a second, etc.).

³ Claire Suddath (2009), “Holy Craps! How a Gambling Grandma Broke the Record,” *TIME*, May 29, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1901663,00.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For questions pertaining to some of the different numbers given in the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch, see the excellent article by Dr. Justin Rogers (2020), “Can I Trust the Numbers in Genesis 5?,” Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/can-i-trust-the-numbers-in-genesis-5-5849/>.



NOTE FROM

The Editor



New VBS: *Fearless*

It was in 2010 that Apologetics Press released its first VBS. It was titled “God’s Creation: Digging for Answers.” Three years later, we released a second VBS titled “The Bible is God’s Word: Digging for Answers.” Both VBS curricula were contained on CD-ROM that enabled churches to access everything they would need to conduct a VBS tailored to their congregational needs. In 2020, we decided to produce a more traditional VBS in which we provide churches with all the materials they need, rather than leaving it to them to print their own. The *Flood* VBS was the result. Though the VBS was released to the public just as COVID was arriving on the scene, which hampered churches from conducting their usual summer VBS, nevertheless, *Flood* became a successful venture and continues to offer an outstanding VBS curriculum option for churches.

Now we are pleased to announce a second traditional VBS offering that constitutes a study of the book of Acts. It is titled *Fearless* and provides young people with insight and encouragement from important people depicted in the book of Acts who manifested a fearless faith, specifically Peter, Luke, Aquila and Priscilla, Stephen, and Paul. The content encourages students to develop their own fearless faith considering the accuracy of



Acts, Peter’s call to pay attention, Stephen’s awareness of Jesus, Aquila and Priscilla’s example of what it looks like to be available to serve God faithfully, and examples from Paul’s life of why a fearless faith is a faith that takes action. The *Fearless* VBS package is Bible-based, practical, and age-appropriate in its effort to equip all ages for a lifetime of faith and inspire attendees to serve God more fearlessly. Visit the AP website as well as fearlessvbs.org for more information.

Dave Miller

See Center Spread
for More Details